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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001704

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: MALDIVES: SPECIAL MAJLIS RECONVENES

REF: A. COLOMBO 1686

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1516

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

[1](#)1. (SBU) The Special Majlis, originally formed for the purpose of considering constitutional reforms, met October 12 for the first time since July when some Members walked out in a dispute over the election of a Speaker. According to Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Chief Government Spokesman, of 109 Special Majlis MPs, 98 attended the three-hour session, including four who were released from detention after the Government lifted the State of Emergency on October 10 (Ref A). (Note: Seven MPs remain in detention. The remaining 4 MPs were out of the country on travel, according to Shaheed. End note.) The next meeting is scheduled for October 14.

[1](#)2. (SBU) According to Shaheed, debate during the October 12 session centered on whether election of the Speaker should take place by open vote or secret ballot. Both sides displayed "a more accommodating spirit" on this issue than during the stormy July session, he said. Some of the MPs who had walked out to protest the absence of a secret ballot during the previous sitting declared that they would not do so this time, while others said if they did walk out, they would return "after a few hours" and not boycott the entire session. The protesting MPs' apparent change of heart will help move reforms forward, Shaheed said, describing the July walk-out as "a delaying tactic . . . designed to frustrate the process." Two of the four former detainees addressed the October 12 Majlis session, he noted, one of whom rose to express his continued support of a secret ballot. A motion has been tabled to vote on the method of electing the Speaker, which will be taken up during the October 14 session. Once a Speaker is elected, Shaheed said, the Special Majlis will be able to turn its attention toward proposals for constitutional reform, adding that he expects that President Gayoom's proposed draft "will carry the day" (Ref A).

[1](#)3. (SBU) Shaheed attributed Gayoom's decision to lift the State of Emergency to the Ambassador's October 6-7 visit. Unlike the disastrous September 6 visit by EU Chiefs of Mission, he said, whose approach set the Government on its "back foot," the more positive tone adopted during the Ambassador's visit produced "more positive outcomes." He indicated that he had understood from the Attorney General that at least some of the detainees had already seen a lawyer but said he would verify that claim.

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: While the Government obviously wants to portray the reconvening of the Special Majlis as proof that reform efforts are back on track, the continued detention without charge of some of its most prominent pro-reform Members will cast a pall over the proceedings. The election of a Speaker (detainee Ibrahim Gasim, once considered a prime contender for the post of Speaker, is clearly out of the running) will be a significant test for this fledgling institution. The selection of a candidate not hand-picked by the President--and thus not bound to ensure that only Gayoom's approved proposals "will carry the day"--would be an important development along the path to reform.

LUNSTEAD